



Mr. Stephen MacNeil,
Board Chair, NSSAF

Rugby Nova Scotia
5516 Spring Garden Road,
Halifax, NS
insert PC

Dear Mr. MacNeil,

We are writing to you regarding the recent events surround the cancellation and subsequent reversal by the Ministry of Education of the high school rugby season. Prior to hearing about the Minister's action, we had requested a meeting with you and your Board to discuss this issue, and find ways to work together to resolve it and optimize safety in our sport and others. The reversal has not lessened our desire to work together toward the best possible outcome.

This letter represents the combined expertise and experience of three individuals (and input from many others):

Mr. Geno Carew, RNS President, and long time player, referee, and administrator.

Mr. Jack Hanratty, RNS Technical Director, Canada U20 Women's Coach, RNS Provincial Coach

Dr. John Gillis, ER doctor, RNS Medical Lead, Former Chief Medical Officer of Rugby Canada, Head Physician, Toronto Arrows Pro Rugby

As we relayed to Mr. Gallant, we were quite concerned that we were not given the opportunity to discuss this matter before the decision was made. We have worked hard as a sport in general, and in this Province to be leaders in injury and head injury prevention. The data presented to you from the SIP are inconsistent with what we see in the field across all sports, and we believe reflect the fact that rugby is accurately reporting injuries and other sports are not.

Let us consider the latter point first. These data indicate about 150 injuries across 50 teams over 5 years. This works out to 1 per team. While we always seek a lower number, this is not a crazy number. On the other hand, any sportsperson, official, or in this case ER physician, will tell you that it is not possible that football and hockey had 1 injury per 3 teams per year. What is concerning is that this reflects an under reporting in these sports, which has the potential to be much more dangerous, as unreported, 2nd injury contact, is far more damaging and debilitating.

Regardless of this interpretation of the data, many other questions surround these numbers. It seems that it was collected based on how each sport chose to execute the reporting process, not by an impartial third party. There is potential for wide variance based on the emphasis placed by players, coaches, officials, and parents. This is not to suggest any bad will in reporting or not reporting, but that it is hard to imagine it is standard across all sports. Again, under reporting is far more dangerous than recognizing and preventing injuries.

Putting ourselves in the place of the Board members seeing these numbers, it is certainly understandable how at first look they are concerning. We also have little doubt that the decision was taking with genuine concern for student athletes in mind. What we hoped would have happened in hindsight, was that an outside expert might have been brought in to look at these numbers and put them into proper context.

As it has happened, the public and professional reaction in the aftermath of this decision has brought out much emotion, but also some very specific and valuable professional factual input. First, we heard from Nova Scotia's Chief Medical Officer of Health, offering his very clear view based on years of experience and access to wide ranges of data that Rugby, for high schoolers or other, is not dangerous. Even more powerful was the intervention of Dr. Rob Green, Director of Nova Scotia's trauma program.

Dr. Green provided a published scientific study, based on data from right here in Nova Scotia, showing only 5 rugby related traumas over a 13 year period in the under 18 population from all across Nova Scotia. The numbers from other sports are far, far higher. The link to that study in the Canadian Journal of Emergency Medicine is provide here.

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/canadian-journal-of-emergency-medicine/article/retrospective-evaluation-of-pediatric-major-trauma-related-to-sport-and-recreational-activities-in-nova-scotia/84756D1013D0185B6FC6F22BB2464944>

Dr. Green further provided us with information from unpublished data of his, that there have been zero Rugby related traumas in any age group (junior, high school, men's, women's) for the last three years in Nova Scotia.

This data is key for several reasons. First, it is unbiased, hospital based, peer reviewed (checked again by outside scientists for validity), and comprehensive over a long period of time. Second, it is local and studied the exact age group in question here. Third, and perhaps most relevant in this case, it gives us great comfort that even though injuries may be being reported,

the manner of which we can debate, there are very clearly almost no serious injuries are coming from Rugby. As administrators and decision makers, we would hope and believe, that this data would give you great comfort that these high school athletes are in fact not at serious risk. This comfort will hopefully give us the time, added to the will we all possess, to come up with a comprehensive plan to address all concerns.

The next key part of this discussion is a clear understanding of the work that Rugby does to establish a safe playing environment for all players. Simply, all coaches, officials, and administrators are required to take safe rugby courses, known as the PlaySmart program <https://playsmart.rugbycanada.ca> outlines the programs and what is required of each group. In 2017, Rugby Nova Scotia, in conjunction with the NSSAF, began rolling out NCCP Community Initiation courses a partnership that we strive to continue and grow.

These programs have made recognition and reporting of head injuries part of the culture of Rugby. Gone is any notion of 'he's just fine', or 'she's just shaken up'.

Our clear mantra is 'recognize and remove'. Players accept, encourage, and appreciate this and are very wary of watching and protecting their friends and team mates.

We are very proud of this work and this culture, and continue to work every day to do more.

On that note, we have been constantly working on ways to make the sport safer. Clearly, your group has some concerns. In the context of everything we have noted above, we firmly believe Rugby is safe at the high school level, but we are willing to do more.

In summary, we are ready to work with NSSAF and all high school programs/coaches/players to ensure that high school rugby continues to flourish but is the safest it can be, and safe to the exacting standards we all believe are necessary.

We look forward to getting together and talking more. Even as the season proceeds, we hope these comments offer you comfort for the present moment, and that you believe in our firm and unwavering commitment to work together to do more.

Best Regards,

Geno Carew
Jack Hanratty
Dr. John Gillis.